

CURRICULUM AND STUDY

It is growing increasingly clear that the age of isolated specialization is over. The advanced scientist now perceives that to augment his knowledge of science he must understand the general principles of fields heretofore regarded as unrelated to science. The same is true of music and the arts, of the philosopher and the economist, the historian and the writer. At the middle of the 20th century, the emphasis—in painting as well as in political theory—is on what happens between things, not on the things in themselves. Today the area of exploration, the premise underlying systematic thinking, is that of function, process, change; of interaction and communication. The universe—including man and his interests—is seen, in microcosm and in macrocosm, as the continuously changing result of the influence that each of its parts exerts upon all the rest of its parts.

This does not mean that factual knowledge of a given subject is of negligible value. On the contrary, to understand a process between two things carries an obligation to know a good deal about the two things. But knowledge, to be useful to an intelligently responsible man or woman, cannot consist solely of an additive accumulation of unrelated data or collection of memorized formulae. To become effective each acquired datum or formula acts on and is acted upon by all those previously acquired, and through this interaction the concepts erected from the integration of previously effective knowledge are slightly altered.

The process of learning varies greatly among individuals depending on their educational background, native ability, and seriousness of intent. It has been the experience of Black Mountain College in its sixteen years of existence that, roughly speaking, entering students fall into two general categories: those who are somewhat mature, reasonably sure of their major interests, and in possession of the ability to study; and those who do not yet know in what field they wish to specialize, what they want to do after leaving college, or how to go about their work. The college curriculum, therefore, is flexible so that students may elect those studies which they believe will best meet their needs. There are no required courses, and courses vary from semester to semester according to current demand. Since faculty members are free to teach what they wish in the manner they prefer, classes are conducted in several ways—as lectures, recitations, seminars, tutorials.

Along with the advanced work, both guided and self-directed, suitable to students of some training and maturity, the curriculum provides for the needs of younger people lacking the knowledge of how to study. Here the purpose of the College is to evoke in the student those habits of work which enable him to acquire knowledge in any field. Once thus equipped, he gains an ability for independent work which prepares him to deal with life